



Frequently Asked Questions About Montessori

As a clearinghouse for all things Montessori, we at AMS often find ourselves fielding questions from the general public. Though there are differences in who is doing the asking—we hear from parents, college students, reporters, and school board members, among others—many similar themes emerge.

Here are some of the things we're asked about most often.

I have seen only Montessori preschools. Are there Montessori schools for older children as well?

Dr. Montessori first developed her educational approach while working with a preschool population. She gradually extended her approach to children and youth of all ages. Today, some Montessori schools provide all levels of learning, from infant & toddler through the secondary (high school) level. Others offer only certain levels.

The benefits of Montessori—the emphasis on independent learning, for example, and the warm, supportive community—continue to be important at each stage of development as children grow into lifelong learners and responsible citizens of the world.

How many students are typically in a Montessori class?

Unlike some private schools, which strive for very small classes, Montessori values the lessons of community when the size of the class is somewhat larger.

Montessori classes for children above the infant & toddler level might include 20–30 students whose ages span 3 years. All members of the community benefit from this set-up. Older students are proud to act as role models; younger ones feel supported and gain confidence about the challenges ahead. Classes for infants & toddlers are smaller, with typically 10–15 children.

How can children learn if they're free to do whatever they want?

Dr. Montessori observed that children are more motivated to learn when working on something of their own choosing. A Montessori student may choose his focus of learning on any given day, but his decision is limited by the materials and activities—in each area of the curriculum—that his teacher has prepared and presented to him.

Beginning at the elementary level, students typically set learning goals and create personal work plans under their teacher's guidance.

Why are Montessori schools all work and no play?

Dr. Montessori realized that children's play is their work—their effort to master their own bodies and environment—and out of respect she used the term "work" to describe all their classroom activities. Montessori students work hard, but they don't experience it as drudgery; rather, it's an expression of their natural curiosity and desire to learn.

If children work at their own pace, don't they fall behind?

Although students are free to work at their own pace, they're not going it alone. The Montessori teacher closely observes each child and provides materials and activities that advance his learning by building on skills and knowledge already gained. This gentle guidance helps him master the challenge at hand—and protects him from moving on before he's ready, which is what actually causes children to "fall behind."

Do Montessori teachers follow a curriculum?

Montessori schools teach the same basic skills as traditional schools, and offer a rigorous academic program. Most of the subject areas are familiar—such as math, science, history, geography, and language—but they are presented through an integrated approach that brings separate strands of the curriculum together.

While studying a map of Africa, for example, students may explore the art, history, and inventions of several African nations. This may lead them to examine ancient Egypt, including hieroglyphs and their place in the history of writing. The study of the pyramids, of course, is a



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natural bridge to geometry.

This approach to curriculum shows the interrelatedness of all things. It also allows students to become thoroughly immersed in a topic—and to give their curiosity full rein.

Is it true that Montessori students have the same teacher for all subjects rather than work with “specialists” in different curricular areas?

Montessori teachers are educated as “generalists,” qualified to teach all sections of the curriculum. But many schools choose to also employ specialists in certain subjects, including art, music, foreign language, physical education, and science.

Why don't Montessori teachers give grades?

Grades, like other external rewards, have little lasting effect on a child's efforts or achievements. The Montessori approach nurtures the motivation that comes from within, kindling the child's natural desire to learn.

A self-motivated learner also learns to be self-sufficient, without needing reinforcement from outside. In the classroom, of course, the teacher is always available to provide students with guidance and support.

Although most Montessori teachers don't assign grades, they closely observe each student's progress and readiness to advance to new lessons. Most schools hold family conferences a few times a year so parents may see their child's work and hear the teacher's assessment—and perhaps even their child's self-assessment.

Do Montessori students take standardized tests?

Public Montessori schools are mandated to administer the same standardized tests as other public schools.

Some private Montessori schools also administer standardized exams, particularly if they will be required by schools into which their students may transition. Other schools choose not to administer these tests.

Can Montessori accommodate gifted children? What about children with other special learning needs?

An advantage of the Montessori approach—including multi-age classrooms with students of varying abilities and interests—is that it allows each child to work at her own pace. Students whose strengths and interests propel them to higher levels of learning can find intellectual challenge without being separated from their peers. The same is true for students who may need extra guidance and support: each can progress through the curriculum at his own comfortable pace, without feeling pressure to “catch up.”

We might note that from a Montessori perspective, every child is considered gifted, each in her own way. For every child has his own unique strengths—it is all a matter of degree.

Are Montessori schools expensive?

Private Montessori schools are independently owned and operated, and each sets its own business practices, including the cost of tuition. Typically, tuition fees vary from region to region and from school to school.

Some private schools offer scholarships for families in need of assistance, and many offer reduced tuition when parents enroll more than one child.

There are also more than 400 public Montessori schools in the United States. These include charter schools, some of which enroll students through a random lottery process. Like other public schools, charter schools are tuition-free.

How well do Montessori students do compared to students in non-Montessori schools?

There is a small but growing body of well-designed research comparing Montessori students to those in traditional schools. These suggest that in academic subjects, Montessori students perform as well as or better than their non-Montessori peers.

In one study, for example, children who had attended Montessori schools at the preschool and elementary levels earned higher scores in high school on standardized math and science tests. Another study found that the essays of 12-year-old Montessori students were more creative and used more complex sentence structures than those produced by the non-Montessori group.

The research also shows Montessori students to have greater social and behavioral skills. They demonstrate a greater sense of fairness and justice, for example, and are more likely to choose positive responses for dealing with social dilemmas.

By less stringent measures, too, Montessori students seem to do quite well. Most Montessori schools report that their students are typically accepted into the high schools and colleges of their choice. And many [successful grads](#) cite their years at Montessori when reflecting on important influences in their life.

For more information, see the "[Overview of Research on Montessori Education](#)" in our online Research Library.

More Questions?

If you have additional questions, or would like to explore Montessori in greater depth, there's a good chance you'll find what you need elsewhere on our Web site.

If you prefer to speak with someone directly, please visit our [Contact Us](#) page to see who's who at AMS. We are always happy to help!

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